Research Plan Proposal

Cultural Context and Familial Relations in Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Alice Walker

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Submitted by:

Niharika Joshi
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Under the Supervision of:

Dr. Rimika Singhvi
Department of English

Research Problem

Family is the smallest unit of society where all the members share their joys, sorrows and anxieties of life. Familial relations are important as they help us interact with the wider social world. The relationships between family members often serve as the central focus in works of literature. In particular, many writers – including women - place great significance on the dynamics of human relationships for relations often present complex, provocative models of interaction.

Women, from time immemorial, have been seen to sincerely play their role of upholding the traditions of the family. Ever since the dawn of civilization, there has been a struggle to emancipate women from male oppression. Consequently, more and more women writers are articulating anxieties and concerns focusing on women's issues and creating a body of 'literature of their own' and transcending the limits of nationality, race, creed, etc. Women writers have been echoing the feeling of marginality and expressing their revolt against the purely masculine world. One of the major concerns of contemporary literature the world over has been to highlight the plight of women, their increasing problems, their physical, financial and emotional exploitation, and their mental anguish in their families as well in the male dominated society in every sphere of life.

Women's suppression is rooted in the very fabric of a traditional Indian society – in religious doctrine and practices, within the education and legal system, and within families. The male domination in a woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent suppression of the woman to a secondary position seem to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. The Indian women writers focused on the dual image of women to break the shackles of their traditional position and search for their identity as an individual, rather than sacrificing at every step for the sake of their

husbands and children. Traditionally, woman has been known to bear primary responsibility for the well being of her family. Yet, she is discriminated against systematically and deprived of access to resources such as education, health care services, jobs, etc. Shashi Deshpande's writing is based on the delineation of such a woman's inner world.

Afro-American literature too documents the multi-faceted nature of oppression and dispossession, mainly of the Blacks. Almost all Afro-American writing is rooted in the historical circumstances of slavery. Whether born in slavery or not, major writers of Afro-American literature before World War I launched their literary careers using 'slave narratives' as their canvas. The horrors and the sufferings caused by the slavery system find vivid articulation in these narratives. Afro-American women writers have been writing mainly about the issues of race and sex faced by Black women in society. These women have been marred both by racial as well gender discrimination. The dual oppression is found to have existed since decades. Black women, however, did not lag behind but actively involved themselves in the movement for equal rights for women and for civil rights for all Afro-Americans.

In my thesis, I propose to analyse and compare select works of two writers - Shashi Deshpande (1938-) and Alice Walker (1944-) - and discuss similarities and dissimilarities between their women protagonists as they redefine gender identity and relationships. I will also examine the struggles which these women protagonists pass through and eventually emerge as empowered individuals.

The chief questions that I will thus investigate are: what are the similarities and dissimilarities between the women protagonists in Indian English and Afro-American fiction in relation to: Conflict between their familial responsibilities and the quest for identity? What kind of relationships do the protagonists maintain with their family members? Are

they able to maintain a balance between Tradition and Modernity in their lives? Is there any difference between the sufferings of Indian and Afro-American women protagonists and their journey from mute acceptance to protest?

In testing my hypothesis, I will analyse two novels each by Deshpande and Walker, viz. *That Long Silence* (1988) and *A Matter of Time* (1999) by the former and *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) by the latter. My approach will consist of a detailed study of primary sources, with reference to the study of secondary sources by various critics. It will also include the historical background of the two cultures, i.e. Indian and African –American. I will also include interviews of the chosen writers.

Definition of Terms

Culture: It **c**onsists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Through culture, people and groups define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to society. Thus, culture includes many societal aspects: language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions.

Gender : It refers to the social identity of men and women. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles of and relations between men and women where woman is inferior and subordinate to man .Gender relations' are characterised by unequal power. 'Gender norms' assign specific entitlements and responsibilities to men and women.

Identity: It relates to self-image (a person's mental model of him or herself), self-esteem, and individuality. Usually refers to individuality of the women protagonists who submit themselves under the forced norms of the male dominated society and their families.

Self : It is a construct of mind which often appears as “inner”. It is an abstraction which constitutes recognition of an individual within himself or herself.

Racism : It involves the belief in racial differences, which acts as a justification for non-equal treatment also regarded as discrimination of members of a particular race . The term is commonly used negatively and is usually associated with race-based prejudice, violence, dislike, discrimination, or oppression .

Sexism: It refers to the discrimination based on sex. Sexism can be compared to racism; in both the differences between two (or more) groups are viewed as indications that one group is superior or inferior. Sexism can refer to either the belief of the person doing the discriminating or their words and behavior.

Patriarchy : It literally means rule of the father in a male-dominated family. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men (who are the patriarchs) as superior to women. The nature of control and subjugation of women varies from one society to the other as it differs due to the differences in class, caste, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practices.

Modernity: The state of being modern by rejecting the old conventions and beliefs. Modernity refers to a progressive force which ensures liberation from ignorance and irrationality.

Tradition : It is a belief or behavior passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past . It is an established practice or a cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions.

Womanism : The womanist movement centers on the feminist efforts of Black women. Usually refers to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior of a woman and also appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength.

Background

Indian English Literature

Culture is a way of life of a group of people - the behaviours, shared beliefs, values, customs, lifestyle and symbols that they accept and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. Culture is so intimate an aspect of human life that it embraces all facets of life including language, way of worship, thinking pattern and lifestyle, all of which are transmitted in the family from one member to the other. The Indian family structure is believed to be the unit that teaches the value and worth of a virtuous living to all the family members. The joint family is an ancient Indian institution, ideally consisting of three or four generations, all living under one roof, working, worshipping and co-operating together in communally beneficial social and economic activities. In fact, people learn the essentials of a cultural life within the bonding of a family. Despite the continuous and growing impact of urbanization, secularization and Westernization, the conventional joint household of the typical Indian family structure, both in ideal and in practice, remains the chief social force in the lives of most Indians. Loyalty to family is deeply imbibed in every member of the family.

The Indian English novel too is firmly rooted in the social and cultural ethos of India. Besides being an experience in literary creativity, it is also a documentation of the Indian life in all its socio-cultural aspects. In almost all societies, a woman is culturally assigned norms of behavior – both within the family and outside it - in which standards of conduct and decorum set the boundaries for her as external signs of what it means to be seemingly proper and respectable within the differentiated hierarchy called gender. Any form of deviation from prescribed norms or any display of transgression in violation to the ideal image of womanhood makes her an unruly woman to be detested by the most societies,

not just Indian. In fact, the portrayal of women's characteristics in male writers' works is normally weak and passive, as pointed out in *The Second Sex*: "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other" (Beauvoir 1989:19). For Beauvoir, the weakness and passivity of the women characters in the works of male authors are not reasoned by the factor of the woman's biology but due to the social system that has long been dominated by the power and authority of men. The position of women has always been degraded by the traditions of a society where they are expected to merge their aspirations and desires with those of their family members. Moreover, the very common notion about women in any once-colonized country like India is developed through the impression of woman as the "Other" or the marginalized.

In a patriarchal society, women – traditionally - have not been seen as equal partners. In India too, the history of women has been eventful. Their place in the socio-political-economic spheres has seen major changes in terms of status, respect, role and responsibilities. Their image in fiction too has undergone a change, especially during the last four decades. The post Independence Indian women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women searching for their identity; they are no longer defined simply in terms of their victim status. Instead, these writers have explored the multi-layered roles of their women protagonists and rejected the ideas that are aligned to patriarchal conventions.

Among women writers who have successfully highlighted Indian women's capabilities and have established themselves firmly on the literary soil include Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sanghal, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, among others. Shashi Deshpande too is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. Being influenced by Western feminist writers apart from critical writings coming out of the Indian subcontinent, these

women writers also raise a voice against women's oppression and focus on the construction of gender in their writings. One of the fundamental and far-reaching social changes brought about after India's independence has been the emancipation of women from their tradition-ridden ethos, which has resulted in the participation of women in male-dominated professions. The socio-economic emancipation of women in India has brought in its train changes in their status and outlook. The widely affected area of this change has been the vital relationship between man and woman. The concepts of love, marriage and sex have undergone a lot of change. Woman, who was dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to her drawn from patriarchal India, is now gaining strength to rebel against the social and cultural oppressions. But, at the same time, she fails to reject totally her social and cultural background. She stands therefore at the crossroads, caught between tradition and modernity.

Deshpande excels in projecting a realistic picture of the middle class educated woman who, although financially independent , still facing the problems of adjustment between idealism and pragmatism. Her main concern is inner consciousness of her women protagonists regarding their conflict between tradition and modernity. Deshpande's women protagonists, with respect to their trials and tribulations, under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity within the family and their response to the emerging situation in life try their best to fit themselves in the contemporary society. A close study of Deshpande's novels reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women whose identities are threatened by the gross gender discrimination and predetermined patriarchal norms. As Amrita Bhalla states: "She lives in a society where tradition is an integral part of daily life and enjoins codes of cultural behavior. The actualization of a self identity is counterpointed against the established norms of a patriarchal society." (Bhalla 14-15)

The central trope in Deshpande's novels is the construction of gender and patriarchy in society, within which she places the conflict of her women protagonists and explores how women's identities have been shaped by varied factors specific to region, caste, and religion. Her novels present the dilemma of her women protagonists and their journey from silence to protest and eventual self discovery. She depicts man-woman relationships, desire and longing, body, gender discrimination , marginalization, rebellion and protest. Her perceptions of women's liberation and autonomy, for instance, are deeply entrenched in the Indian women's situatedness within the socio-cultural and economic solaces and paradigms of the country. The woman who occupies some social space being identified as wife, mother, daughter, and sister is not free; she is in fact held in captivity. Viewed from this position , the woman in India is still trapped in the Brahaminic worldview so much so that she cannot have an independent existence without her husband.

That Long Silence and ***A Matter of Time*** deal with the conflicts of an Indian woman who is trying to strike a balance between her traditional roles and self- identity. The dead weight of the traditional patterns of wifehood only substantiates the sacrificial actions of women in myth and legend. Both Jaya and Sumi, in the two novels respectively, liberate themselves from the shackles of being ideal wives and realize their feminine self through identity-assertion and self-affirmation. Thus, the conflict of these two women is every woman's conflict that she experiences between the desired and the imposed.

Jaya in *That Long…* is projected as a woman who wants to fashion herself according to the dreams of her husband that is, by imitating the life pattern of women in orthodox families. As she reads in women's magazines about how to be a good wife and keep the husband happy. A wife must behave according to her husband's wishes to make their marriage successful and happy. Physically and socially there are different measures that

patriarchy employs in placing women and marking their space. The women protagonists pass through trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity and to critically analyze their response to the emerging situation in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society.

In *A Matter…,* Sumi liberates herself by such an action which de colonizes the patriarchy. She starts creative writing to resist her marginality and liberate herself. There is a question in front of her- whether she is Gopal's wife only or the mother of her children or an individual being. Definitely her heart has selected the third one from the multiple choice question because it is not the question set in her exams – it is the question of her identity – it is a question related to her life. Her mode of liberation is writing.

Deshpande`s thematic concerns in her novels have also been discussed. In a male dominated society , woman is supposed to be an ideal wife , a mother, and an excellent homemaker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and series of adjustments that she makes in her life faithfully and obediently are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in a patriarchal society. In an interview she states : " Liberation never means doing without family. No, no, no, . To me liberation does not mean leaving your marriage. We are human beings. Human beings are social animals and we need all these ties….." Talking about Jaya in *That Long…,* she says : " She is not going to live up to the model of a wife which her husband Mohan wanted. She is going to be herself . That is true liberation as far as I am concerned. It does not mean that she has to walk out of the family. Who does not need the security of a family?" (147) The book thus highlights the escalating positivism in the women protagonists in Deshpande's novels.

That Long… thus reveals an intriguing picture of an ordinary middle class educated woman Jaya Kulkarni who lives with her husband Mohan and two children Rahul and Rati. The story entirely revolves around Jaya, her married life and her role as a dutiful wife and an affectionate mother. She has to pass through the trials and tribulations as an Indian housewife and as a writer as well. The novel is an autographical narrative of Jaya , who faces a conflict between self- expression and self generated suppression of a woman who has to fit herself to a preconceived image of a stereotype wife and a mother. She tries her best to be a good wife, an ideal mother but fails in both her relations. Her husband never considers her as a companion but only as a wife who is married to look after his house . He neither understands her nor cares for her but always absorbed in his own work. Jaya wishes to be a writer but couldn't because of her familial responsibilities. Eventually she decides to search her identity as a human being and becomes a writer but still could not come out of her worries regarding her husband and children.

In *A Matter…,* the novelist shows how Sumi becomes the victim of the implicit patriarchal domination. Her husband Gopal leaves her after long years of marriage without explaining anything. She lives in utter desolation without knowing her fault. The novel resists patriarchy through positioning the three women characters in disadvantageous circumstances. Sumi and her three daughters return to the house owned by her mother Kalyani after she was deserted by her husband Gopal. Sumi accepts Gopal's decision placidly not because she lacks the courage to counter him but because she knows the futility of remonstration. A closer look at her refusal to react to Gopal shows not a passive acceptance of man's supremacy but a critique of tradition. Her method of resistance is balanced and motivated towards reclaiming her identity. She becomes economically independent, immerses herself in gardening, writes and directs plays and thus discovers herself. As she confronts the past with admirable self-control, It is the triumph of Sumi's restrained resistance that her husband who deserted her should speak admirably about her.

In all these relationships, the woman occupies the central stage and significantly the narration shifts through her feminine/ feminist consciousness. Her novels reflect the lives of suffocated women in search of a refuge from suffering. Searching for a solution to their private problems, the women protagonists in her novels shift from their personal pains to the sufferings of the other women around. Their professions or social commitments sometimes come in conflict with the expectations of the husband and create tensions within the family. Finding it difficult to cope with the tensions arising out of their professional roles and domestic expectations, Deshpande's women initially seek relief through abandonment of their professional roles. They quit their professions and try to seek peace by confining themselves to their familial roles as homemakers. Deshpande has thus tried to show how her women characters reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. The women characters in her novels are, like the colonial women, reduced to certain stereotypes and the society denies to sanction them an identity. So, her women characters crave for identity – to establish a space of their own as the New Woman who is primarily characterized by the spirit of rebelliousness, visibly exercising its influence on all relationships, the boundaries of time and space notwithstanding. Deshpande's novels clearly spell out the faith that a woman's desire to succeed as an individual does not negate her desire for love, marriage and domesticity. A balanced and purposeful life is not a utopian fancy for a woman if she liberates herself from the stereotyped conditioning of the society and is not dependent on the male presence to authenticate her thoughts and deeds at every step.

African-American Literature

Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resilience are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation. The Africans brought to the English colonies as slaves in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries did not carry with them a network of beliefs, customs, institutions, and practices constituting what might be called with accuracy a unified "African" culture. Yet, the people of Africa created a myriad of languages, religions, customs, and social, political, and economic institutions, which differentiated them and gave them separate identities. Despite the realities of a racial and political situation and even in the midst of the brutalities and injustices of the racial system, Black men and women were able to find the means to sustain a far greater degree of self-pride and honour. Upon the hard rock of racial, social, economic exploitation and injustice, Black Americans forged and nurtured a culture by forming and maintained kinship networks, raising and socializing their children, building a religion, and creating a rich, expressive culture through which they articulated their feelings, hopes and dreams.

In fact, during the seventeenth century, slaves had little opportunity to establish family units since the newly imported African slaves were often kept in sex-segregated quarters Enslaved people could not legally marry in any American colony or state. Colonial and state laws considered them property and commodities, not legal persons who could enter into contracts, and marriage was, and is, very much a legal contract. The degree to which these beliefs and values were practiced depended on the nature of the slave regime and the geographical environment. Despite the obvious pressures of slave owners and White cultures, slaves were able to adapt and maintain familial networks. While disruptions often occurred through sale, death, or forced displacement, these somehow caused the slaves and

their communities to adapt and form larger shared kin networks of fellowship and communication based on patterns devised wholly by the Blacks themselves.

Out of this attempt were born Slavery narratives which depicted the personal experiences of the slaves who had escaped slavery and run to the North, developed in the middle of the nineteenth century. Their common motifs included the physical and the psychological abuse resulting from slavery, the White owners' hypocrisy and the slaves' quest for freedom and education. These narratives gave the people who lived in the North a glimpse of the slaves relationships with each other, the bond and love between family members and the respect for the elders.

The years between World War I and the Great Depression were characterized by an economic boom which resulted in many jobs. Between 1920 and 1930, around 750,000 African-Americans migrated from the South to the North, 175,000 of them to Harlem, which became the largest concentration of Black people in the world. The Harlem Renaissance (1920-1940), originally called the New Negro Movement, represented a literary and intellectual flowering and had its seat in the African-American community in Harlem, New York. The Blacks witnessed Harlem Renaissance – the growing of writing about race and identity and the Afro-Americans' place in the cultural, social and artistic life in America. Harlem captured the imagination of these people as the place was a contrast to the South. It gave a status to the Black community and opened up large vistas of social opportunities for them, promising employment and a decent living.

The Civil Rights movement too had a great impact on Black writers during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Just as Black activists were trying to put an end to racism and segregation, so were Black authors addressing these topics in their writing. Starting in 1970, Afro-American literature was analyzed and accepted as a genre. While Toni Morrison, for

instance, became the first Afro-American author to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, Alice Walker introduced and developed the 'womanist' theory, criticism and practice, and continues to champion the cause of women of colour by encouraging their strength and liberation in her life and her writings. By and large, the New Negro turned to Africa and Afro-American folklore for a usable past. The nineteenth-century image of Africa as a primitive land, a source of shame and self-hatred for many Black Americans, was transformed into a symbol of pride by many such literary developments. Hazel V Carby comments : "The novels of Black women should be read not as passive representations of history but as active influence within history. In other words, I am considering novels not only as determined by the social conditions within which they were produced but also as cultural artifacts which shape the social conditions they enter. The novels of Black women, like the slave and free narratives that preceded them, did not just reflect or "mirror" a society; they attempted to change it." (95)

Walker's novel titled ***The Color Purple*** is an epistolary novel that deals with the hardships of a young woman within the patriarchal system. It represents a dispassionate scholarly effort to comprehend the essential elements of her prolific imagination, which celebrates women by chronicling their troubled journey from silence to self-expression and from pain to resistance, through the unifying bond between Black women; through "their friendships, their love, their shared oppression". Shug Avery is at first a friend to Celie, eventually a lover, but always a subtly guiding "mothering" influence who, like the mothers of Walker's "generations," enables Celie to evolve into an independent, self-identified woman, no longer benignly accepting the emotionally crippling conditions that have enslaved her. While Shug does not give literal birth to Celie, she does give her spiritual rebirth and consequently Celie becomes, then, the "new Black woman" who recreates her new identity which is more enriched and more empowered than before.

Walker called upon the influence of her maternal ancestor, her mother, and her literary ancestor, Zora Neale Hurston, as the collective models for Shug Avery, the woman who would inspire possibility in Celie the same way both women from Walker's personal history inspired possibility in her. Celie has been denied a “self" and is treated merely as an object. She has been repeatedly raped by her step-father and viewed as a necessary replacement for her own mother who was too ill and too weary of sex to act on her own. Later, when given to Mr. Albert as his wife-slave, she is described by her step-father in terms of her ability to work and to attend to Albert's sexual needs, being viewed as mere property for exchange. Robbed of her self-esteem and reminded repeatedly that she is black poor and ugly girl and nothing else. Celie gradually begins to view herself in the same way. Walker sees herself as battling the demons lurking in the hallways of institutional establishment, an establishment that, in all intents and purposes, has thrown women, especially black women, into a dark alley, resigned them to a fixed, stereotyped and inferior level of existence.

The novel thus underscores the oppression Black women have experienced throughout history in the rural South in America Women were also regarded as less important than men—both Black and white—making Black women doubly disadvantaged. Black women of the era were often treated as slaves or as property, even by male members of their own families. Celie is passed on from her father to her husband (Albert) without any regard for her own desires. She constantly struggles to forge her own self-identity and to not accept the subservient role that society has ascribed to her. In the course of the novel, Sophia becomes Celie's first role model of a Black woman who does not allow the men surrounding her to limit her lifestyle.

Additionally, the novel examines themes of sisterhood and methods of sharing among women in their quest for political, sexual, and racial equality. Celie is able to

overcome her many hardships because of the love and solidarity she receives from women like Nettie, Sophia, and Shug Avery. By seeing herself as a member of a community, Celie develops a sense of identity and realizes new opportunities in her life. When Shug stops Celie from killing Albert, Celie is inspired to find a new outlet for her passion and creativity. This leads to the creation of Celie's business, which offers her more personal and financial freedom.

In all her novels, Walker examines Black women's struggle and the courageous fight they put up against a racist and a sexist society that stifles their growth towards selfhood and wholeness. An African woman, Tashi, is the protagonist of ***Possessing the Secret of Joy***. The novels explores the complex web of relationships between pain (ritual) and womanhood (resistance) and shows how in the process of forging female selfhood, the struggle forces the need to change the ritual. Tashi wants to undergo the surgical procedure of genital mutilation and also have a scar (tribal sign) marked on her face. Both are painful, but they are signifiers of the African identity - the only thing that Whites failed to erase in the Blacks. Walker talks about the traumatic condition of her protagonist who struggles to comprehend the impact of genital mutilation - physically, mentally and emotionally - and survives its consequences. The novel thus explores the phallic control of women's lives and the indoctrination of women to make the procedure a tradition, offering no option to the unsuspecting young women. Written from a womanist point of view, the novel also examines familial relationships.

Tashi has never forgotten the way her favourite sister, Dura, died during this ritual, without even having the right to voice her agony since the dictum determines: "You mustn't cry". Tashi undergoes terrific dreams about her sister's mutilation and her crying in pain, to get rid of the guilt of having been unable to help her. Tashi's attempt to preserve through the ritual what is an African destroys her sexuality. She manages to preserve her racial identity

at the expense of her gender identity. Ultimately, Tashi resists the ritual by killing the cause, M'Lissa, who was the oppressor. In this way, Tashi avenges her sister's offender. Even though murder is a negative version of liberation, Tashi shows her courage to change the situation that prevents the African women from blossoming into wholeness. Tashi's murder of M'Lissa presents the case that women should not continue 'destroying' the joy and pride of womanhood in an attempt to serve the masculinist myth that sanctions lack of female-self empowerment. The husband–wife relationship in the novel is in contrast to *The Color…* where Tashi's husband loves her and gives moral support throughout the story. Written from a womanist view, the novel also explores familial relationships.

Walker's womanist credo seems exemplified in the words and the passions of Shug. Her life and literature have been an expression of splendour and love of life. But, they have also arisen from her immersion in the stuff of lamentation, outcry, blues.. Since the 1960s, when she was a Civil Rights activist, to the 1990s, when she has become a spokesperson for women subjected to ritual genital mutilation and the Earth subjected to waste and depredation, Walker has spoken for life and flourishing and loving kindness through poetry, short stories, novels, essays, journals, feature film, and documentary. In her fiction and nonfiction, Walker celebrates young love, gay and lesbian love, new love, partnerships that last, marriages that mature and grow Over the more than three decades of her writing life, Walker has immersed herself in protest, civil disobedience, writing, speaking, traveling, and film making on behalf of numerous causes. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s involved her in demonstrations, the voter registration campaign, and defiance of Mississippi's anti-miscegenation laws during her marriage to Mel Leventhal. The 1970s saw her entry into the feminist movement as a regular contributor to *Ms.* magazine and a friendship with Gloria Steinem. The 1980s brought international attention with her Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple* and Steven Spielberg's adaptation of the book to film. During this decade, Walker defined - and in some ways invented - womanist awareness and the

womanist movement. In the 1990s, she stood firmly against the Gulf War, visited Cuba and promoted a conciliatory view of Castro, mounted a campaign against 'female circumcision' (genital mutilation). All of these causes have figured in her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. And with them has been a persistent strain of attentive concern for the fate of the earth. From the beginning of her writing life, it seems, Walker has seen her role as giving voice to the voiceless.

Review of Literature

Amrita Bhalla offers a detailed study of the two novels : *A Matter of Time a*nd *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande. It highlights the construction of gender and patriarchy in society. This is also the central trope in Deshpande's novel, within which she places the conflict of her women protagonists and explores how women's identities have been shaped by varied factors specific to region, caste, and religion. The book also presents the dilemma of Deshpande's women protagonists and their journey from silence to protest and self discovery, which is quite relevant to my study and a great source of learning and analysis. I would further examine the different conditions under which these women try to strike a balance between their traditional roles and self- identity; liberate themselves from the shackles of being ideal wives; and, realize their feminine self through identity assertion and self affirmation. I find the book very useful as it focuses on Deshpande's depiction of man-woman relationship, human desire and longing, body, gender discrimination, marginalization, rebellion and protest.

Another book by Chanchala K Naik talks about how the women protagonists pass through trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity and try to fit themselves in contemporary society. The book is of a great use as it discusses Deshpande`s thematic concerns as to how in a male dominated society, the woman

is supposed to be an ideal wife, mother, excellent homemaker, among her multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and the series of adjustments that she makes in her life faithfully and obediently are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in a patriarchal society. In my thesis, therefore, I plan to discuss that self discovery does not mean that the woman has to walk out of her family but how - without severing relations - she manages to acknowledge her own identity.

Much relevant to my study also is the discussion by Ikenna Dieke of how Alice Walker celebrates women by chronicling their troubled journey from silence to self-expression and from pain to resistance, criticism and practice. My analysis would trace the journey of her women characters who undergo inner development and maturation and, in the process, abandon their old attitudes and assumptions. The book *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* describes the traumatic conditions of Black women and their struggle to overcome the troubles in their life. Ikenna Dieke, for instance, discusses Walker's womanist theory and her epistolary novel *The Color Purple* that deals with the hardships of a young woman within the patriarchal system and also represents a dispassionate, scholarly effort to comprehend the essential elements of Walker's prolific imagination.

Gerri Bates discusses the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* which focuses on female circumcision and the trauma which the protagonist passes through thereafter. It also highlights the intimate relationship between Tashi and her sister, who died during genital mutilation and how Tashi avenges her sister's death by killing M'Lissa. Adam, Tashi's husband, is loving and caring and tries his best to help her come out of this trauma but fails to do so. All of these critical writings are very useful for me as I propose to analyze familial relations of both the novelists' women protagonists and also discuss those against the framework of the bigger canvas of human relationships.

Both the authors talk about womanhood, redefining women's identity, and their protagonists' journey from submission to resistance. They play different roles within their families and eventually long to search for their inner self and eventual happiness. These women cross the threshold and bring out a new woman from within them who thinks about herself as an individual first and the rest later. The above discussed critical writings are very important as I seek to compare and contrast my primary sources in the light of the relationships that the women protagonists maintain alongside their quest for identity. I also wish to contrast the conditions of Afro-American and Indian women by taking into account their sufferings followed by protest. I propose to do so by examining secondary readings, especially to find out whether the husbands of these women are the same in terms of character, nature and temperament or do they differ and also whether they support their wives or become the cause of their agony and depression.

The condition of women in both the cultures is found to be the same in terms of their anguish and then their empowerment. Indian women - treated as subalterns since ages – are shown to speak out in protest and ultimately overcome their stereotyped position and suffering which is inflicted more in psychological terms. On the contrary, the Afro-American women go through as much physical as psychological pain and suffering for they are the victims of both patriarchal and racial discrimination and abuse. They suffer from double marginalization, still continue their journey from despair to hope. Their struggle is common, they fight a battle like brave warriors and ultimately emerge victorious thereby becoming the queens of their own destiny.

Research Methodology

My research methodology would consist of a close reading and analysis of primary sources. I will also support my study with a significant number of critical writings which deal with the subject of socio-cultural and gender issues. My approach will be interdisciplinary and I will consult books on Sociology, Culture and Society, and on Psychoanalytical studies. To make my interpretations more significant and relevant, I would work within the specific guidelines of feminist theories and recent criticism and also examine Indian feminist criticism in terms of the oral traditions (i.e. folklore, myths, etc.). My primary attempt would be to study the various relationships as delineated in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Alice Walker. I would also focus on the sufferings of the women protagonists and their journey from silence to resistance. Although the novels of the above mentioned authors belong to different cultures, my study would focus on the universal sufferings of women and their quest for redefining their identities against the framework of traditional culture. I would thus analyze the multilayered roles of women in their families and society and also their intimacy and differences with their family members (viz. husband, father, mother, sister and other close relations).

Tentative Chapterization

1. Introduction : The first chapter would be an introduction to Indian and Afro-American socio-cultural backgrounds and also focus on the historical context of the two cultures.

2. Cultural Values and Family Structure in Indian and Afro-American Society : This chapter would include the study of the family structure in Indian and Afro-American society. The chapter would also discuss different aspects of the two cultures, viz. the nature of the family as a unit, its customs and traditions, and the like.

3. Marginalization of Indian and Afro-American Women : This chapter would examine the double bind or marginality that women experience: as victims of patriarchal attitudes and subalternity (in the Indian context) and as victims of patriarchy and racial discrimination (in the Afro-American context). The common aspects of their pain and anguish would be studied and a comparative study of the traumatic experiences and subjugation of the women protagonists would be done. In addition, the culturally-sanctioned domination and the violent acts of sexual and domestic abuse since childhood (especially in the case of Afro-American women) would be analysed for how these negatively affect the personality of the abused women within the family.

4. From Transgression to Redefining Identity in the novels of Shashi Deshpande : The women protagonists of Deshpande reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and vehemently oppose the culturally-entrenched supremacy of male power and authority over the female. The women characters in her novels are, like the colonial women, reduced to certain stereotypes and the society denies sanctioning them an identity. Thus her characters crave for identity and to create and occupy a space of their own. They play

different roles within their families and are engaged in the search for their inner self and their own happiness. This chapter aims to trace the women protagonists' eventful journey as they cross the threshold and bring out a new woman from within them who eventually thinks about herself as an individual first, then as daughter, sister, wife, mother.

4. From Silence to Resistance in the novels of Alice Walker : Walker has turned her critical attention to the customs and traditions of the Black community which have, been so devised as to keep woman subservient to man by denying her the right of control even over her own body and mind. Various strategies employed by men of her community to keep woman away from power have been exposed ruthlessly by Walker in her works. This chapter would therefore focus on the subjugation of women by way of oppression and exploitation, denial and dispossession at the hands of the men in her family, community and in the larger racist world, and how it is only a part of the complex story of the Black woman's suffering as well as her heroic struggle to break or transcend the shackles of her bondage and move towards liberation, expansion and a regeneration of her self.

6. Conclusion : This chapter would take an overall view of how Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships and gives us a faithful picture of familial, marital and filial bonds in the Indian society; how She deals with love between married couples and between children and parents, relationship with grandparents, family bonds in a typical Hindu society, family under traditional feudal days and modern times. Walker, on the other hand, would be assessed for how, in the ultimate analysis, she explores the complex and difficult course of a Black woman's journey from a state of bondage to freedom, from denial of self to a sense of self-worth, as she goes about recreating a new identity for her women protagonists which is more enriched and more empowered than before.

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